

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 26982

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ASEC, TH

SUBJ: COUNTERFEITING ACTIVITIES IN THAILAND

1. DURING CHARGE'S CALL ON FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN DECEMBER 29, DEPUTY INTERIOR MINISTER PRAKOP PRAYUNPHOKKHARAT WAS PRESENT. CHATCHAI OPENED SESSION BY ASKING PRAKOP TO DISCUSS PROBLEM OF COUNTERFEIT U.S. \$20 BILLS CIRCULATING IN THAILAND.

2. PRAKOP BEGAN BY PRODUCING THREE COUNTERFEIT TWENTIES. HE SAID THEY HAD BEEN PICKED UP IN THE UTAPAO AREA, WHERE THERE WAS A SURGE IN THEIR CIRCULATION. HE THOUGHT THEY WERE BEING PRINTED IN HONG KONG AND BROUGHT I TO THAILAND BY U.S. PERSONNEL THROUGH UTAPAO AIR BASE. ALTHOUGH NONE OF THE COUNTERFEIT \$20 BILLS HAD YET APPEARED IN AREA OF KORAT, THERE WERE REPORTS THAT THEY WERE CIRCULATING THERE. IT WAS FEARED THAT THEY WOULD NEXT APPEAR IN THAI BEACH RESORT OF PATTAYA, NOT FAR FROM UTAPAO, AND WOULD EVENTUALLY FIND THEIR WAY TO BANGKOK.

3. PRAKOP AND CHATCHAI, EMPHASIZING NEED FOR DISCRETION, REQUESTED THAT U.S. CONDUCT ITS OWN IN-CONFIDENTIAL

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VESTIGATION WITHOUT INVOLVING THAI AUTHORITIES.

(COMMENT: THEY WERE CLEARLY IMPLYING THAT INVOLVEMENT OF THAI AUTHORITIES WOULD BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE). CHATCHAI, IN FACT, SAID THAT HE HAD INVITED PRAKOP TO HIS OFFICE FOR THE DISCUSSION SO AS TO PRECLUDE QUESTIONS THAT WOULD HAVE ARISEN IF CHARGE HAD BEEN SEEN CALLING ON PRAKOP AT INTERIOR MINISTRY. CHARGE SAID THERE HAD BEEN REPORTS OF COUNTERFEIT \$20 BILLS IN THAILAND FOR SOME TIME BUT THAT HE WOULD SET A NEW INVESTIGATION IN MOTITN AND WOULD KEEP CHATCHAI INFORMED.

4. COMMENT: COUNTERFEIT U.S. \$20 BILLS HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING IN THAILAND FOR A LONG TIME AND THIS FACT IS WIDELY KNOWN. U.S. MILITARY INVESTIGATIVE AUTHORITIES HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH THAI POLICE ON PROBLEM. CHATCHAI'S STRICTURES AGAINST INVOLVING THAI POLICE ARE THEREFORE CURIOUS AT THIS STAGE OF THE GAME,ALTHOUGH IT IS POSSIBLE THAT HE AND PRAKOP WERE UNAWARE OF PREVIOUS HISTORY.

5. WITHOUT EFFECTIVE ACTION BY THAI AUTHORITIES, IT SEEMS DOUBTFUL THAT ANY PROGRESS WILL BE MADE TOWARD SUPPRESSING THE CIRCULATION OF COUNTERFEIT U.S. \$20 BILLS IN THAILAND. NONETHELESS, WE WISH TO BE RESPONSIVE TO CHATCHAI AND PRAKOP'S REQUEST. EMBASSY HAS THEREFORE ASKED CID AND OSI TO INITIATE NEW U.S.-ONLY INVESTIGATIONS AT UTAPAO AND SAMAE SAN. WE THINK IT WOULD BE MOST USEFUL IF IN ADDITION, TREASURY AGENT COULD BE MADE AVAILABLE HERE ABOUT MID-JANUARY. IF THIS CAN BE DONE, WE WOULD PROPOSE TO ADVISE CHATCHAI SOONEST AND URGE UPON HIM USEFULNESS OF CONSULTATION BETWEEN TREASURY AGENT AND APPROPRIATE THAI POLICE AUTHORITIES. THIS WOULD PUT THE AFFAIR BACK IN THE ONLY CHANNEL IN WHICH IT CAN BE HANDLED, THAT IS, COOPERATION BETWEEN U.S. AND THAI INVESTIGATORS.

7. THE DEPARTMENT IS REQUESTED TO ARRANGE FOR A VISIT TO THAILAND BY A TREASURY AGENT BY MID-JANUARY. MASTERS

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